

DANAM CONFERENCE 2006

SESSION PW 4

Theme: Prayer and Worship in Dharma Traditions and Western Religions

Sub-Theme: Prayer and Worship in Buddhist and Jaina Traditions

Rita D. Sherma, Binghamton University, Convener and Presiding

ABSTRACTS

Rita M. Gross, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Prayer and Worship in Vajrayana Buddhism

Many people think that because Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, prayer would not be possible. Nevertheless, in Vajrayana Buddhism, one finds many liturgies which sound as if they are addressing someone. I often tell people that if one didn't know beforehand that Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, one could never figure that out from its ritual and liturgical practices. Furthermore, Tibetans who are fluent in English use the word "prayer" very comfortably. In this presentation, we will explore this seeming paradox of prayer in a non-theistic context. In the process, we will challenge some conventional theistic ideas concerning the purpose of prayer, what happens when people pray, and why people pray.

David Drewes, University of Manitoba

Worship in Indian Mainstream and Mahayana Buddhism

This paper offers a new general perspective on worship and devotional practice in Indian Buddhism through roughly the fourth century CE. It attempts to problematize the still widely current model of Buddhism beginning as a movement focused on transformative meditative experience and later developing into a "popular" religion focused on worship, magic, etc. It suggests additionally that the rise of Mahayana Buddhism brought little if any significant innovation in Buddhist cult practice.

Judith Simmer Brown, Naropa University

Prayer and Worship in Tantric Buddhism

Abstract unavailable at the time of printing.

Anne Vallely, University of Ottawa

Denying and Renouncing, Desiring and Pleading: The Art of Jain Prayer

The ascetic character of Jainism is well known. It denies the existence of a creator God and the concept of grace, and insists that the goal of liberation must be achieved by one's own efforts alone. Its pantheon of venerable beings (the Tirthankara-s), are too far removed from the world of samsara to concern themselves with the beseechings of their followers. And yet, the lived tradition of Jainism reveals a different picture in which desiring and imploring, miraculous mantras and miracles inform much of Jain devotional practices. This paper will explore how prayer is differently conceived and reconciled within these seemingly contradictory orientations.

M. Whitney Kelting, Northeastern University, Boston
Why might Jains Make Prayers No One Answers?

Jain texts and rituals suggest that contemporary Jains juggle their own devotional impulses with the Jain theological stance that the Jinas cannot and will not answer prayers. By examining the narrative of the Jain sati, Candanbala, as a paradigmatic devotee of Mahavir, this paper suggests that contemporary Jains link their experiences of unanswered prayers to Candanbala's suffering in ways that give meaning to their continued worship of beings who are not listening.